

**JOHN 20:11-18 (NRSV)**

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'*

*She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'*

*Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'*

*Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'*

*She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).*

*Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'*

*Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

**The Word of the Lord...**

**As we continue to experience The Word of the Lord together, let us pray.** *Great Parent, Loving God, Great concerned and involved Lord, open up our hearts and our minds and stir up within us your Spirit, so that we might grow in faith and serve you with our whole hearts and minds. If these words are not your Word, may they be forgotten and come to naught, but if they be thy Word, may they adhere to our hearts, forever transforming us from glory into glory, into the creatures you would have us be, thou who art our rock and our redeemer, Amen.*

I had a teacher in grammar school named Mr. Finan. He taught Industrial Arts – shop class. He wasn't our favorite teacher in the school but he wasn't our least favorite either. Like all of our teachers he was **Mr.** Finan. I also had *Mr. Feury, Mrs. Jones and Ms. Marshall* (actually, *senorita Marshall*, por favor Katrina). None of my teachers were Chris or Melissa. They were Mr., Mrs. or Ms. – even the cool ones.

Soon after we got into high school my friend's mother married Mr. Finan. My friend's father left when he was in the first grade. His Mom had met Mr. Finan in church when we were in the seventh grade. But he was the only Industrial Arts Teacher in the grammar school so they waited to date until my friend went to high school. In hindsight, I remember she did cheer very loudly at our eighth grade graduation.

Anyway, by mid-ninth grade they were married and Mr. Finan told my friend that whenever he was ready, he didn't have to call him Mr. Finan any more, he could call him Bill.

My friend just couldn't do it. It was partially a habit thing, but it was also a comfort level thing and a bit of a grumpy thing. See my friend was happy for his Mom, he really was, but truth be told he had gotten used to things the way they were – just him and his Mom. He didn't need another relationship.

Now he woke up and bumped into someone outside the bathroom, "Good morning Mr. Finan." Now there were three people around the dinner table, "Please pass the butter, Mr. Finan." And there was now another adult around to check on his schoolwork, "Can you please sign my report card Mr. Finan?"

Always, it was 'Mr. Finan'.

It is often the case that the name we use for someone is dictated by the type of relationship we have with them. A move from a proper name, such as Mr. Finan, to a more personal one has to come from more than just an invitation. There has to be a shift in the relationship, something has to be altered decisively. A new type of relationship has to be achieved. The invitation can be there, but both parties have to agree.

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All of us gathered in this space on this day have a relationship with God – none of our relationships are the same. Some of us love God but only on our terms, we don't want to get too close. Some of us used to have a great relationship with God, we rarely missed an opportunity to get in touch. But a relationship on that level, like any, required some work and commitment on our part, so we let it go.

Some of us go through the motions of a relationship with God – Sunday morning worship (√), fellowship events (√), committee night (√)... but we pray no one asks us about our relationship with God because we are pretty sure we don't have the answers.

When was the last time we talked to God anyway?

A relationship – even with our Lord and Savior – requires work. Relationships thrive with effort. The difference, of course, is that in this relationship, God is always there... even when we cannot see past our own failings and disappointments. The thing is, God craves an intimate relationship with us. God misses us when we are gone.

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It makes sense that Mary Magdalene was the first to arrive at the tomb and the one who stayed after the others saw it was empty. Of all of the disciples, she was the most intimate with Jesus.

I don't mean Hollywood/N.Y. Times Bestseller list intimate. I mean that she consistently understood who he was even before he died. Or at least she thought she did which I am sure is partly why she weeps.

How could she have been so wrong?

Not only was this man who promised a new life - a new creation - killed brutally, nailed to a cross... but now someone had done the ultimate in disrespect and stolen the body before he could be properly prepared for burial.

If we pause right here... many of us can feel for Mary.

Her relationship has been broken.

She should have known better.

Relationships disappoint.

No one is who they say they are and rarely who we think they are.

“Don’t you see, Mary? You believe in someone and what happens? You weep.”

But this is not an earthly kingdom relationship. This relationship does not disappoint. No matter how long we’ve been away, no matter how much our faith has fallen, no matter whether we wear the label of hypocrite or point that label out in others – God does not leave us.

And so Mary Magdalene stands at the tomb as she weeps.

Where did the angels come from?

They hadn’t been there before... or had they?

Sometimes you can only see angels through tears.

And then... the Gardener.

Mary’s guess, that he must be the gardener, was wrong at one level, and right – so very right – at another. This was the new creation. Jesus is the beginning of it. Jesus has come to uproot the thorn and thistles and replace them with blossoms and harvests.

He is alive, with a new sort of life, the like of which we’d never seen before. Mary carries out the instruction to tell the others. “I’ve seen the master, and this is what he said, and it is good!”

The news is still good today for each and every one of us, for the new creation has offered a new kind of life – a new kind of relationship – to us.

This moment in our relationship with God has happened now! Jesus had called his followers disciples, servants and friends. Now that has changed. Listen again to verse 17: *Go and say to my brothers, I am going up to my father and **your** father, to my God and **your** God.*

Something has altered decisively. Something has been achieved. A new relationship has sprung to life like a sudden spring flower. With these words we are welcomed into a new world, a world where we are free to know God the way Jesus knows God, a world where we are cherished children of the Creator.

No longer are we left to fend for ourselves. No longer are we kept at a distance from the one who created us. No longer are we drowning in our self-made seas of self-doubt and sinfulness.

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The summer before our senior year I went to the beach with a group including my friend, his Mom and Mr. Finan. We were in and out of the ocean all day and as the afternoon deepened no one noticed the shift in the wind and tide. We all decided to head into the water one more time before dinner and as most of us peeled off t-shirts, towels and hats my friend ran in ahead of us.

He was only up to his knees when a wave coming in and a strong undertow combined to knock him off of his feet and a riptide shot him out to sea. We watched helplessly as he tried to make his way back in but the current was too strong... and he started to panic. In the blink of an eye our casual day at the beach had taken a horrific turn as my friend was now at least 30 yards from the shore... and he was struggling.

As I stood there in shock, a man rushed past me, dove into the water and swam out to my friend. They struggled a bit until my friend trusted the man's strength and guidance and together they drifted down the shore line, away from the rip tide, and eventually made their way back to the safety of the sand.

As they kneeled and panted and clung to one another on the beach, my friend looked up at his rescuer, Mr. Finan, and said, "Thanks Dad."

Sometimes calling someone by a title just won't do anymore.  
Sometimes something happens, closeness in a relationship is established – and only a more intimate name will do.

The Creator of our world,  
    The Redeemer of our souls,  
        The Sustainer of our lives is offering us a new kind of understanding – a deeper level of relationship. It's already there, ready for us – full of love and compassion, understanding and forgiveness.

All we have to do is accept... and we are saved.

Thanks God.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.